DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 101 CS 502 995

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TITLE Managerial Roles and Functions at the Corporate Level of Television Group Ownerships.
INSTITUTION Colorado State Univ., Ft. Collins.
PUB DATE Feb 80
NOTE 19p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association (Portland, OR, February 16-20, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role: Communication (Thought Transfer): *Communication Skills: Job Analysis: Job Skills: *Managerial Occupations: Organizational Communication: *Research: Role Perception: *Television
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Research

ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to provide a base of knowledge concerning managerial roles at the corporate level in the television industry. Specifically, the study sought to determine (1) the amount of time consumed by corporate television executives in different managerial roles, (2) the importance of different managerial roles as perceived by the executives, and (3) the extent to which the executives were involved with various corporate level and station level administrative tasks and decisions. Forty executives responded to the questionnaire survey. The results showed that executives spend much time in many roles, with the leadership role involving the interpersonal interaction with subordinates and the decisional roles standing out as the most time consuming. Those roles considered to be most time consuming by the exectives were also seen to be the most important. In response to the third area of inquiry, the executives' responses indicated that the corporate television executive's influence is greatest in those corporations where the executive manages a station directly. (FL)

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MANAGERIAL ROLES AND FUNCTIONS AT THE CORPORATE LEVEL OF TELEVISION GROUP OWNERSHIPS

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(This research supported in part by a faculty research grant from Colorado State University)

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MANAGERIAL ROLES AND FUNCTIONS AT THE CORPORATE LEVEL OF TELEVISION GROUP OWNERSHIPS

Despite the pervasiveness and impact of television in our society, little research evidence is available concerning the managerial roles and functions within the industry. Even less research is evident concerning the functioning and impact of broadcast group owners, even though such "groups" control over 60% of the American commercial television stations. Citizen groups and some legislators have maintained that groups act as a detriment to the welfare of the American public by diminishing competition and diversity of ideas. Others suggest that the groups and the corporate staffs serve little purpose except to act as figureheads. The fact that little research has been completed in the area serves to leave the question currently unanswered. This study provided a preliminary analysis of broadcast management at the corporate level of group owners by developing a profile of the roles, activities, and station level involvement of television executives at the top corporate level.

Review of Literature

Two parallel lines of literature have focused on the managerial job. One line attempts to isolate and describe the job requirements of managers. The rationale for such study is that the development of management science depends on the understanding of managerial working processes. Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, and Weick[1] suggested the need for more study in the area, and initial information has been contributed

by Mintzberg[2] and Phillips.[3] Literature in the area, however, remains largely superficial.

The parallel area of literature discusses individuals as occupants of roles within an organization and discusses role expectations and role relationships.[4] For managers there may be multiple roles required because of the diversity of relationships they encounter. Mintzberg[5] has outlined the managerial position in terms of interpersonal roles, informational roles, and decisional roles. Subsequent research has been conducted using a role framework as a basis for profiling health care executives and other industry leaders.[6]

Related to the broadcasting industry, neither of the lines of research has drawn much attention, except for the dissertation work of Phillips.[7] In fact, little systematic research of any sort is evident concerning broadcast management. Rhea[8] found implications for station management were dependent upon the different situational variables with no singular management style predictive of success. Subsequent analysis of the data obtained by Rhea indicated that discrepancies in management and subordinate perceptions of managerial style were inversely related to some measures of performance.[9] The above broadcasting studies are susceptible, however, to the criticism leveled by Hall at early management research: although focused on managerial styles, the studies deal with managers who are not at the top of the total organization and thus potentially are restricted in their functioning by top leaders. Consequently, "there is very little evidence regarding the effect that top leaders have on organizations."[10]

In the television industry, nearly two-thirds of the American commercial television stations are owned by corporations which also own additional television stations, i.e. group owners.[11] In effect, the station managers of these stations serve in positions of middle management, perhaps with restrictions imposed by the corporations as suggested by Hall. Legislators at a recent Federal Trade Commission symposium on media concentration voiced concern about such potential restriction and influence on the individual stations using words such as "abusive," "powerful," and "provocative" to describe the conglomerate role.[12] Even more recently, Ralph Nader, now head of the National Citizens Committee for Broadcasting, decried proposed media deregulation as further "entrenchment ' of federally protected monopolies for a few hundred corporations at the expense of 220 million Americans.'"[13]

Case studies of television group operations have suggested some concentration of control at the corporate level in budget and other financial matters[14] and have indicated some decision-making roles of corporate leaders.[15] However, the case studies have also indicated that the individual station managers have autonomy for most decision-making and may receive major benefits from the corporation for serving their communities.[16]

Hawes[17] has questioned the top level impact on station operation, even as determined by the case studies, citing the limited scope of the studies. Further, David Blank, vice president and chief economist of CBS, in responding to economic analyses of networks and groups, has pointed to "major flaws" in such reports noting the isolation of the analysts from the actual operation of the organizations.[18]

Rationale for the Current Study

The scarcity of research in broadcast management and the case study approach used in the research that has been done make it impossible to formulate an overall understanding of the management functions in the industry. The limited results suggest some corporate influence on station operation, but the lack of foundational research and knowledge concerning the roles and functions of broadcast groups leaves much open to speculation and criticism. This study has attempted to provide a preliminary base of knowledge concerning corporate level roles and activities in answer to three specific research questions:

(1) How much time is consumed by corporate television executives in different managerial roles?

(2) How important are different managerial roles at the corporate level of television as perceived by corporate television executives?

(3) To what extent are corporate television executives involved with various corporate level and station level administrative tasks and decisions?

METHOD

For purposes of this study, terms have been operationally defined as follows:

A television group owner is a corporation which fully owns more than one commercial television station within the 50 states or the District of Columbia. Reference to television group owner and corporation is synonymous. One-hundred-twenty such group owners were identified using Broadcasting Yearbook 1978.

TABLE 1

MANAGERIAL ROLE DESCRIPTIONS[20]

Interpersonal Roles

The figurehead role: the corporate television executive is a symbol required by the status of his office to carry out a variety of social, legal, and ceremonial duties in which he represents the organization.
The leader role: the executive has interpersonal relationships with his subordinates; as he hires, trains, and motivates them, he must essentially bring their needs in accord with those of the organization.
The liaison role: the executive has interpersonal relationships with people outside of his own organization and spends a considerable amount of time developing a network of high-status contacts in which information and favors are traded for mutual benefit and through which the executive exerts community leadership.

Informational Roles

The monitor role: the executive continually seeks and receives information about his organization in order to understand changing situations and his organization's environment.
The disseminator role: the executive shares some of the environmental information with his subordinates.
The spokesman role: the executive informs outsiders about the progress, problems, and activities of his organization.

Decisional Roles

The entrepreneur role: the executive takes the responsibility for bringing about changes in his organization, looking for problems and opportunities, and then initiating projects to deal with them.
The disturbance-handler role: the executive takes charge when his organization faces a major disturbance or crisis and deals with the resulting problems.
The resource allocator role: the executive decides who will get what in his organization; he establishes priorities, designs his organization, and authorizes all important decisions.
The negotiator role: the executive takes charge whenever his organization must enter into crucial negotiations with other parties; his presence is required because he has the information and the authority to make the decisions that difficult negotiations require.

Corporate television leader or executive is the person identified by the corporation as responsible for the operation of the television entities within that corporation. The executives were identified from Broadcasting Yearbook 1978 for the respective corporations. Verification of their responsibility was sought through the early questions on the data gathering instrument.

Data Collection

A questionnaire adapted from that used by Forrest, Johnson, and Mosher[19] was mailed to the entire population of 120 corporate television executives. Thirty-four questionnaires were totally completed and returned. Four questionnaires were returned partially completed, and two executives returned narrative statements concerning corporate leader responsibilities. In all, forty executives (33.3% of the population of concern) provided at least some useable information.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section consisted of questions to verify the executive's position as the one responsible for group station operation and further sought to determine corporate hierarchy and structural characteristics. For purposes of this paper, the respondents were divided into two groups as determined from the first section of the questionnaire: those who directly managed one of the stations in the group and those who did not have individual station managerial responsibilities.

The second section of the questionnaire contained the role descriptions shown in Table 1. Executives were asked which one of the roles was the most time consuming and which one of the roles was least

time consuming; which two of the roles were above average in terms of time consumed and which two were below average. The remaining four roles were to be placed in a box marked average. A parallel response pattern was to be followed in terms of the executives' perceptions of the importance of the roles in attaining the organization's goals and in terms of the importance of each of the roles in the future (three to five years).

The third section of the questionnaire listed corporate level and station level administrative tasks. Respondents were asked to check for each of the sixty-one tasks one of four columns indicating the responsibility for accomplishment of the task. The column headings were as follows: (1) Performed Directly (a primary duty of the corporate executive); (2) Accomplished Indirectly (a responsibility of the executive but usually accomplished by delegation of the duty to others); (3) Performed by Others (not a direct responsibility of the executive); and (4) Not Performed (not performed by any personnel at the corporate level).

The final section of the questionnaire sought comments concerning skills, abilities, and goals important for corporate television executives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper presents the results of the study. Fifteen executives who directly manage a group station and twenty-three executives who do not manage a group station provided useable information for some of the tables and discussion that follows. Not all of the executives answered all the questions, but all responses that were given are included.

Managerial Roles

Table 2 reflects the mean scores for the two groups of executives with regard to time consumed in the respective managerial roles. (For

each respondent, the most time consuming role was coded a 5; the two above average roles were coded as 4; the four average roles were coded 3; the two below average, 2; and the least time consuming was coded as 1.) The roles are rank ordered for each of the groups of executives. In each case the leader and entrepreneur roles ranked #1 and #2 respectively, indicating key corporate level responsibility in interpersonal and decisional areas. The four least time consuming roles were also consistent for the two groups with two of the roles being labeled as informational roles and the other two as interpersonal. For those who managed a station directly, the decisional roles of resource allocator and disturbance handler were more time consuming than they were for those who did not manage a station directly. For the latter group, the informational role of monitor was the third most time consuming role.

TABLE 2

MANAGERIAL ROLES: TIME CONSUMED

	Executives who Manage*		Executives who do not Manage**	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Leader	4.27	1	3.80	1
Entrepreneur	3.83	2	3.75	2
Resource Allocator	3.36	3	3.44	4
Disturbance Handler	3.36	3	2.88	6
Negotiator	3.18	5	3.25	5
Monitor	3.00	6	3.59	3
Liaison	2.75	7	2.82	7
Disseminator	2.16	8	2.61	8
Spokesman	2.09	9	2.55	9
Figurehead	1.75	10	1.37	10

* 12 of the 15 respondents who have direct managerial responsibility of a group station answered all or part of this question.
** 18 of the 23 respondents who do not have direct managerial responsibility of a group station answered all or part of this question.

Table 3 presents the mean scores for the two groups of executives with regard to their perceived importance of the various roles. Those

two roles considered the most important (leader and entrepreneur) were consistent with those roles considered the most time consuming for each group. The perceived importance of the remainder of the roles differed somewhat between the two groups with the most notable differences indicated concerning the roles of disturbance handler and disseminator. Perhaps predictably, the role of disturbance handler was seen as much less important by those executives who do not directly manage the day-to-day operations of a station and its personnel. The role of disseminator was considered equally important on the average for executives who do not manage a station directly as was the role of disturbance handler. However, the disseminator role was seen as one of the least important roles to those executives who manage a station directly.

TABLE 3

MANAGERIAL ROLES: IMPORTANCE

	Executives who Manage*		Executives who do not Manage**	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Leader	4.18	1	3.94	1
Entrepreneur	4.00	2	3.78	2
Resource Allocator	3.45	3	3.25	4
Disturbance Handler	3.40	4	2.76	7
Negotiator	3.40	4	3.67	3
Monitor	2.90	6	3.20	5
Liaison	2.40	7	3.00	6
Spokesman	2.20	8	2.37	9
Disseminator	1.91	9	2.76	7
Figurehead	1.73	10	1.37	10

* 11of the 15 respondents who have direct managerial responsibility over a group station answered this question...at least in part.
**18 of the 23 respondents who do not have direct managerial responsibility of a group station answered this question...at least in part.

Table 4 indicates the respondents' rankings concerning their perceptions of the future importance of the respective roles. The roles of leader and entrepreneur still ranked as the top two. However, for those executives who directly manage a station, the entrepreneur role was considered as a much more important role in the future than in the present and far more important than the leadership role. Non-managers considered the leadership role to be most important for the future. Other differences in perceived importance of roles for the future are notable, although similar to the differences indicated between the two groups concerning the importance presently perceived.

TABLE 4

MANAGERIAL ROLES: ANTICIPATED IMPORTANCE

	Executives who Manage*		Executives who do not Manage**	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Entrepreneur	4.36	1	3.87	2
Leader	3.54	2	4.00	1
Disturbance Handler	3.50	3	2.93	7
Negotiator	3.30	4	3.50	3
Resource Allocator	3.09	5	3.23	5
Monitor	2.90	6	3.42	4
Liaison	2.40	7	3.08	6
Figurehead	2.36	8	1.86	10
Spokesman	2.30	9	2.31	8
Disseminator	1.82	10	2.28	9

* 11 of the 15 respondents who have direct managerial responsibility over a group station answered all or part of this question.
** 15 of the 23 respondents who do not have direct managerial responsibility of a group station answered all or part of this question.

In summary, the interpersonal role of leader and the decisional role of entrepreneur respectively were the two most time consuming and the two most important roles of the corporate television executives. The two were also considered by the executives to be the most important

roles for the future, although the trend was not so clear as to which one might be the top role in the next three to five years.

The other decisional roles (disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator) were also considered above average in importance and in time consumed. The trend was for those executives who have individual station managerial responsibilities as well as their corporate executive responsibilities to indicate even more time consumed and more importance on such roles than their counterparts who do not have to manage the day-to-day operation of a group station. Such a trend would suggest that station level decisions are being made by the executive/managers. The trend seems further to suggest at least some degree of autonomy in decision making for those group stations not managed by the corporate television executive.

None of the roles were considered unanimously to be least time consuming nor of least importance, but the interpersonal role of figure-head and the informational roles of disseminator and spokesman consistently ranked lowest.

Managerial Tasks

Questionnaire items encompassed sixty-one station level and corporate level duties. In general, the specific tasks performed by executives were reflective of the roles they identified as time consuming and important. Those executives who managed a station directly were involved more with specific station level activities. However, with both groups, the major involvement with stations pertained to management level evaluation and appointment, capital expenditures, policy planning, and financial matters.

Table 5 indicates the nineteen specific tasks (out of sixty-one) that were identified most often as being performed directly by the corporate executives. Two of the duties (evaluating managerial performance of station managers and appointing station managers) reflect a direct involvement in station operation and perhaps an indirect influence on decision making processes at the station level. Five other tasks (appointing national sales reps for stations, approving purchases of expensive equipment by stations, representing stations at hearings, allocating corporate resources to stations for assistance in corporate goals, and assisting station managers with their administrative problems and responsibilities) indicate further involvement in station level activity. The other top tasks are involved more directly with corporate level activity.

Some major differences should be noted between executives who manage a station and those who do not. A higher percentage of executive/managers are involved with station activity throughout the television group. In contrast, a higher percentage of executive/non-managers perform corporate level planning, goal-setting, and coordination of corporate level personnel.

None of the top nineteen specific tasks seems to indicate a direct influence on the service of individual group stations to their communities except as it involves the capabilities of equipment and the consequent approval of equipment purchases. A more direct influence on the stations exists, however, in some groups as nearly 25% of the corporate executives did indicate that they approved station programming strategies, formulated news policies for stations, and analyzed and recommended changes in news at the station level. One of the executives who did not manage a station

TABLE 5

THE TOP TASK ACTIVITIES PERFORMED DIRECTLY BY CORPORATE EXECUTIVES

	Executives Who Manage # Performing Directly	Rank	Executives Who Do Not Manage # Performing Directly	Rank	Overall Rank
Represent the corporation in its relationships to other television related groups	12	3	20	1	1
Approve purchase of expensive equipment by stations	13	1	19	2	1
Evaluate managerial performance of station managers	12	3	19	2	3
Appoint station managers	12	3	18	6	4
Recommend changes to stations based on analysis of financial performance	13	1	16	12	5
Advise the board of trustees on matters requiring policy formulation	12	3	17	11	5
Appoint national sales reps for stations	12	3	16	12	7
Develop a long-range planning program for the TV division of the corp.	12	3	16	12	7
Communicate general information to station managers	12	3	16	12	7
Appoint corporate level personnel	10	14	18	6	7
Represent corporation to industry organizations	10	14	18	6	7
Establish corporate policies, procedures, and regulations to be used by all stations	9	20	19	2	7
Keep informed of legal changes affecting the corporation	12	3	15	17	13
Represent stations at hearings	11	11	15	17	14
Plan and determine manpower requirements at the corporate level	8	28	18	6	14
Establish corporate level goals	8	28	18	6	14
Direct and coordinate activities of corporate level staff	6	38	19	2	17
Allocate corporate resources to stations for assistance in corporate goals	8	28	16	12	18
Assist station managers with their administrative problems and responsibilities	11	11	13	20	18

even indicated that he formulated programming policies for the group owned stations. The results indicate, however, that for the most part programming and news decisions are primarily responsibilities of the local stations.

In summary, it might be suggested that corporations and the top corporate television executives are directly involved with station level operation. However, it should be underscored that such involvement is primarily in financial, legal, and industry-related matters. A direct involvement was not nearly so evident in programming and news, and yet even in such areas, there was direct corporate executive influence in some corporations.

Skills and Activities

A final question was asked of respondents concerning those skills and abilities they deemed important to be developed now and in the future by corporate television executives. Many answers were offered but those that appeared most often pertained to personnel management skills (leadership/motivation/communication) and business skills (accounting/cost control/financial planning). Such skills were those that tended to summarize the activities and roles of the corporate television executives.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This study sought to answer three specific research questions, and certain guarded conclusions can be drawn in answer to each one. First, with regard to how much time is consumed by corporate television executives in different managerial roles, the results of this study would indicate that

the executive spends much time in many roles. Certainly, developing a specific role description for such executives is impossible. However, the leadership role involving the interpersonal interface with subordinates and the decisional roles, specifically as they involve business matters and finances, stand out as the most time consuming and the most important ones, for the present and for the future. Such conclusions are consistent with role research in other industries.[21] Further, the data gathered in this study are supportive of the current organizational communication literature which suggests that a manager spends the majority of his time involved in communication.[22]

The second research question concerned the importance of the managerial roles as perceived by the corporate television executives. The data gathered in this study suggest that those roles considered to be the most time consuming are also the most important.

The third research question asked to what extent the corporate television executives were involved with various corporate level and station level administrative tasks and decisions. The results indicate that the corporate influence cannot be ignored in group owned stations. The results further indicate that the corporate television executive's influence might be even greater in those corporations where the executive manages a station directly. However, such corporate influence is most evident in financial areas, and as such the solidarity of the group structure may actually be enhancing the individual station in its service to its local community.

Two specific limitations should be underscored to temper the conclusions herein. The first is the small return from corporate television

executives. Thirty-three percent return, though average for mail questionnaires, is still small. However, one-third of the entire population of corporate executives seems to provide an important yield of data from which conclusions about corporate television roles and activities can be drawn.

A second limitation concerns the fact that this study has relied totally on the perceptions of the corporate television executives themselves. Surely, the results have provided an important base of knowledge adding to the study of management and specifically to the functioning of the broadcasting industry. However, especially as it involves the corporate influence on station activity, further definition of the role of the corporate executives awaits additional perceptions from all levels of the corporation.

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